

Ruff Grouse

If you are new to Alaska and miss the upland bird hunting you enjoyed in the lower 48 don't despair. You can put your dog and shotgun to use in Alaska. Let's talk ruffed grouse hunting.

Interior Alaska has some of the best ruffed grouse hunting in the country and hunting grouse with a good friend, or a dog, can be an outdoor experience to remember. Ruff grouse are easily distinguishable from spruce grouse by their distinct black band on their tail feathers. Upland bird hunters prefer hunting ruffed grouse as their meat has a mild taste whereas spruce grouse can become quite gamey due to a seasonal change in their feeding habits.

You can improve your chances to bag "ruffs" if you know where to look for them. Ruffs prefer a forested habitat with aspen, alder, and birch trees. They eat on the fruits, berries and buds of a variety of trees and shrubs. Ruffed grouse usually spend their entire life in a small area often no more than 40 acres in size. In the winter grouse will often burrow into fluffy snow to keep warm and to avoid predators leaving their snow burrows to feed and roost in the trees. North Post on Ft. Wainwright, the Yukon Training Area and the hills surrounding Fairbanks are areas that provide good grouse cover and support healthy populations of ruffs.

If you have either a 20 or 12 gauge shotgun you are in good shape for hunting upland birds. Shotgun chokes for upland game birds are often debated with advocates believing they have the edge with a favorite choke. Your skill level with the shotgun in your hand is more important than a technical edge provided by a specific choke. You will save yourself some shotgun shells and missed birds if you practice on some clay birds before you head to the field. The post

trap and skeet range is open all year for your practice and shooting enjoyment.

If you are hunting on military lands be sure to read both the State of Alaska regulations for your specific game management unit and Army hunting regulations. Army regulations relating to outdoor activities can be found in the Outdoor Recreation Regulation Supplement. You can pick up a copy of the supplement at your post Natural Resource Office or read on-line. Don't forget your hunting license and Hunter Education Card as both will be requested by the Army Conservation Officer if stopped in the field. Lastly, you are required have a Recreation Access Permit and check in on the USARTRAK phone-in system.

Remember to always been an ethical hunter, wear hunter orange and never shoot from or across a road as it is dangerous and illegal. Hunting ruffed grouse after a fresh fall or winter snowfall is one of those outdoor pleasures that should not be missed.

If you would like additional information about hunting or other outdoor activities on military lands contact your Army Natural Resources Office on Ft. Wainwright 353-6490, Ft. Richardson 384-3909 and Donnelly Training Area 873-1615 or visit their website at www.usarak.army.mil/conservation.

Have fun, be safe and good hunting.